

My name is Allison Van Etten and I am the Director of Special Services for Stonington Public Schools. I am writing to support HB 6517, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force to Analyze the Implementation of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction and Training. It was my distinct honor to serve as a member of the Dyslexia Task Force, which drafted the recommendations for HB 6517. In my capacity on the Task Force, I served as the Chair of the Higher Education Subcommittee.

For students with dyslexia, learning to read can be a significant challenge. According to the International Dyslexia Association, it is estimated that 15-20% of the student population exhibit symptoms of dyslexia. Students with dyslexia have difficulty learning to read in the absence of a structured literacy program that provides explicit instruction in systematic word identification and decoding strategies. From the onset of my tenure in this position, it became quickly apparent to me that both our special education teachers and reading specialists had ***not*** received the appropriate level of training as part of their pre-service teaching program, in the area of structured literacy. Since 2013, I have had to dedicate a significant number of resources to provide my teachers training in the area of structured literacy, to meet the needs of struggling readers like those with dyslexia. This meant dedicating approximately \$25,000 per year, over a span of 5 years, along with all of my professional development funds, to support this training. As a result of this, all other professional development needs of my department were cast aside. Additionally, I had to hire my own independent training consultant, as there are no established in-service training models through the Connecticut State Department of Education.

While the training of our pre-service teachers in the area of structured literacy is a critical factor, and major piece of HB 6517, I want to emphasize the importance providing in-service professional development, for our current teachers, who were not appropriately trained, and who do not have the advantage of a district- sponsored training. HB 6517, specifically section 4, directs CSDE to establish an in-service training program advisory council, to specifically develop a model dyslexia in-service training program, aligned with structured literacy competency targets. It is important that a consistent model be developed that is not only based on these competency targets, but one that is also sustained, hands-on, practical, and includes opportunities for extended learning, as well as professional collaboration.

I am fortunate to work for a school district that was able to support and provide this training to its teachers. However, the need to provide this training, as educators did not have the requisite skills from their undergraduate programming, resulted in a significant cost to the school district in terms of both funding and allocation of resources. It is critical that districts be provided more support in this area. I believe that HB 6517 will direct the work that is needed for structured literacy in-service training, and will have a tremendous impact on the instructional needs of our most struggling readers in Connecticut.

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